The Normal Heart

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

From "September 1, 1939"
W. H. Auden
Scenes and Approximate Dates

Act One
Scene 1: The office of Dr. Emma Brookner        July, 1981
Scene 3: Ben's law office                       October, 1981
Scene 4: Ned's apartment                        November, 1981
Scene 5: Ned's apartment                        March, 1982
Scene 6: Ben's law office                       May, 1982
Scene 7: Ned's apartment                        October, 1982

Act Two
Scene 8: Emma's apartment                       October, 1982
Scene 9: A meeting room in City Hall            October, 1982
Scene 10: Emma's office                         October, 1982
Scene 11: The organization's old office         February, 1983
Scene 12: Emma and the Examining Doctor         April, 1983
Scene 13: The organization's new offices-to-be   April, 1983
Scene 14: Ned's apartment                       April, 1984
Scene 15: Ben's law office                      May, 1984
Scene 16: Felix's hospital room                 May, 1984

Characters
Craig Donner
Mickey Marcus
Ned Weeks
David
Dr. Emma Brookner
Bruce Niles
Felix Turner
Ben Weeks
Tommy Boatwright
Hiram Keebler
Grady
Examining Doctor
Orderlies

Time
The action of this play takes place between July 1981 and May 1984 in New York City.
Act One

Scene One

The office of DR. EMMA BROOKNER. Three men are in the waiting area: CRAIG DONNER, MICKEY MARCUS and NED WEEKS.

CRAIG: (After a long moment of silence) I know something’s wrong.

MICKEY: There’s nothing wrong. When you’re finished we’ll go buy you something nice. What would you like?

CRAIG: We’ll go somewhere nice to eat, okay? Did you see that guy in there’s spots?

MICKEY: You don’t have those. Do you?

CRAIG: No.

MICKEY: Then you don’t have anything to worry about.

CRAIG: She said they can be inside you, too.
MICKEY: They're not inside you.

CRAIG: They're inside me.

MICKEY: Will you stop! Why are you convinced you're sick?

CRAIG: Where's Bruce? He's supposed to be here. I'm so lucky to have such a wonderful lover. I love Bruce so much, Mickey. I know something's wrong.

MICKEY: Craig, all you've come for is some test results. Now stop being such a hypochondriac.

CRAIG: I'm tired all the time. I wake up in swimming pools of sweat. Last time she felt me and said I was swollen. I'm all swollen, like something ready to explode. Thank you for coming with me, you're a good friend. Excuse me for being such a mess, Ned. I get freaked out when I don't feel well.

MICKEY: Everybody does.

(DAVID comes out of EMMA's office. There are highly visible purple lesions on his face. He wears a long-sleeved shirt. He goes to get his jacket, which he's left on one of the chairs.)

DAVID: Whoever's next can go in.

CRAIG: Wish me luck.

MICKEY: (Hugging CRAIG.) Good luck.

(CRAIG hugs him, then NED, and goes into EMMA's office.)

DAVID: They keep getting bigger and bigger and they don't go away. (To NED.) I sold you a ceramic pig once at Maison France on Bleecker Street. My name is David.

NED: Yes, I remember. Somebody I was friends with then collects pigs and you had the biggest pig I'd ever seen outside of a real pig.

DAVID: I'm her twenty-eighth case and sixteen of them are dead. (He leaves.)

NED: Mickey, what the fuck is going on?

MICKEY: I don't know. Are you here to write about this?

NED: I don't know. What's wrong with that?

MICKEY: Nothing, I guess.

NED: What about you? What are you going to say? You're the one with the health column.

MICKEY: Well, I'll certainly write about it in the Native, but I'm afraid to put it in the stuff I write at work.

NED: What are you afraid of?

MICKEY: The city doesn't exactly show a burning interest in gay health. But at least I've still got my job: the Health Department has had a lot of cutbacks.

NED: How's John?

MICKEY: John? John who?

NED: You've had so many I never remember their last names.

MICKEY: Oh, you mean John. I'm with Gregory now. Gregory O'Connor.

NED: The old gay activist?
MICKEY: Old? He's younger than you are. I've been with Gregory for ten months now.

NED: Mickey, that's very nice.

MICKEY: He's not even Jewish. But don't tell my rabbi.

CRAIG: (Coming out of emma's office.) I'm going to die. That's the bottom line of what she's telling me. I'm so scared. I have to go home and get my things and come right back and check in. Mickey, please come with me. I hate hospitals. I'm going to die. Where's Bruce? I want Bruce.

(MICKEY and CRAIG leave. dr. emma brookner comes in from her office. she is in a motorized wheelchair. she is in her mid- to late thirties.)

EMMA: Who are you?

NED: I'm Ned Weeks. I spoke with you on the phone after the Times article.

EMMA: You're the writer fellow who's scared. I'm scared, too. I hear you've got a big mouth.

NED: Is big mouth a symptom?

EMMA: No, a cure. Come on in and take your clothes off.

NED: I only came to ask some questions.

EMMA: You're gay, aren't you? Take your clothes off.

(Lights up on examining table, center stage. NED starts to undress.)

NED: Dr. Brookner, what's happening?

EMMA: I don't know.

NED: In just a couple of minutes you told two people I know something. The article said there isn't any cure.

EMMA: Not even any good clues yet. All I know is this disease is the most insidious killer I've ever seen or studied or heard about. And I think we're seeing only the tip of the iceberg. And I'm afraid it's on the rampage. I'm frightened nobody important is going to give a damn because it seems to be happening mostly to gay men. Who cares if a faggot dies? Does it occur to you to do anything about it. Personally?

NED: Me?

EMMA: Somebody's got to do something.

NED: Wouldn't it be better coming from you?

EMMA: Doctors are extremely conservative; they try to stay out of anything that smells political, and this smells. Bad. As soon as you start screaming you get treated like a nutcase. Maybe you know that. And then you're ostracized and rendered worthless, just when you need cooperation most. Take off your socks.

(NED, in his undershorts, is now sitting on the examining table. EMMA will now examine him, his skin particularly, starting with the bottom of his feet, feeling his lymph glands, looking at his scalp, into his mouth...)

NED: Nobody listens for very long anyway. There's a new disease of the month every day.

EMMA: This hospital sent its report of our first cases to the medical journals over a year ago. The New England Journal of Medicine has finally published it, and last week, which brought you
running, the *Times* ran something on some inside page. Very inside: page twenty. If you remember, Legionnaires' disease, toxic shock, they both hit the front page of the *Times* the minute they happened. And stayed there until somebody did something. The front page of the *Times* has a way of inspiring action. Lie down.

**NED:** They won't even use the word "gay" unless it's in a direct quote. To them we're still homosexuals. That's like still calling blacks Negroes. The *Times* has always had trouble writing about anything gay.

**EMMA:** Then how is anyone going to know what's happening? And what precautions to take? Someone's going to have to tell the gay population fast.

**NED:** You've been living with this for over a year? Where's the mayor? Where's the Health Department?

**EMMA:** They know about it. You have a commissioner of health who got burned with the swine flu epidemic, declaring an emergency when there wasn't one. The government appropriated $150 million for that mistake. You have a mayor who's a bachelor and I assume afraid of being perceived as too friendly to anyone gay. And who is also out to protect a billion-dollar-a-year tourist industry. He's not about to tell the world there's an epidemic menacing his city. And don't ask me about the president. Is the mayor gay?

**NED:** If he is, like J. Edgar Hoover, who would want him?

**EMMA:** Have you had any of the symptoms?

**NED:** I've had most of the sexually transmitted diseases the article said come first. A lot of us have. You don't know what it's been like since the sexual revolution hit this country. It's been crazy, gay or straight.

**EMMA:** What makes you think I don't know? Any fever, weight loss, night sweats, diarrhea, swollen glands, white patches in your mouth, loss of energy, shortness of breath, chronic cough?

**NED:** No. But those could happen with a lot of things, couldn't they?

**EMMA:** And purple lesions. Sometimes. Which is what I'm looking for. It's a cancer. There seems to be a strange reaction in the immune system. It's collapsed. Won't work. Won't fight. Which is what it's supposed to do. So most of the diseases my guys are coming down with—and there are some very strange ones—are caused by germs that wouldn't hurt a baby, not a baby in New York City anyway. Unfortunately, the immune system is the system we know least about. So where is this big mouth I hear you've got?

**NED:** I have more of a bad temper than a big mouth.

**EMMA:** Nothing wrong with that. Plenty to get angry about. Health is a political issue. Everyone's entitled to good medical care. If you're not getting it, you've got to fight for it. Open your mouth. Turn over. One of my staff told me you were well known in the gay world and not afraid to say what you think. Is that true? I can't find any gay leaders. I tried calling several gay organizations. No one ever calls me back. Is anyone out there?

**NED:** There aren't any organizations strong enough to be useful, no. Dr. Brookner, nobody with a brain gets involved in gay politics. It's filled with the great unwashed radicals of any counterculture. That's why there aren't any leaders the
majority will follow. Anyway, you’re talking to the wrong person. What I think is politically incorrect.

EMMA: Why?

NED: Gay is good to that crowd, no matter what. There’s no room for criticism, looking at ourselves critically.

EMMA: What’s your main criticism?

NED: I hate how we play victim, when many of us, most of us, don’t have to.

EMMA: Then you’re exactly what’s needed now.

NED: Nobody ever listens. We’re not exactly a bunch that knows how to play follow the leader.

EMMA: Maybe they’re just waiting for somebody to lead them.

NED: We are. What group isn’t?

EMMA: You can get dressed. I can’t find what I’m looking for.

NED: (Jumping down and starting to dress.) Needed? Needed for what? What is it exactly you’re trying to get me to do?

EMMA: Tell gay men to stop having sex.

NED: What?

EMMA: Someone has to. Why not you?

NED: It is a preposterous request.

EMMA: It only sounds harsh. Wait a few more years, it won’t sound so harsh.

NED: Do you realize that you are talking about millions of men who have singled out promiscuity to be their principal political agenda, the one they’d die before abandoning. How do you deal with that?

EMMA: Tell them they may die.

NED: You tell them!

EMMA: Are you saying you guys can’t relate to each other in a non-sexual way?

NED: It’s more complicated than that. For a lot of guys it’s not easy to meet each other in any other way. It’s a way of connecting—which becomes an addiction. And then they’re caught in the web of peer pressure to perform and perform. Are you sure this is spread by having sex?

EMMA: Long before we isolated the hepatitis viruses we knew about the diseases they caused and had a good idea of how they got around. I think I’m right about this. I am seeing more cases each week than the week before. I figure that by the end of the year the number will be doubling every six months. That’s something over a thousand cases by next June. Half of them will be dead. Your two friends I’ve just diagnosed? One of them will be dead. Maybe both of them.

NED: And you want me to tell every gay man in New York to stop having sex?

EMMA: Who said anything about just New York?

NED: You want me to tell every gay man across the country—

EMMA: Across the world! That’s the only way this disease will stop spreading.

NED: Dr. Brookner, isn’t that just a tiny bit unrealistic?
EMMA: Mr. Weeks, if having sex can kill you, doesn't anybody with half a brain stop fucking? But perhaps you've never lost anything. Goodbye.

(BRUCE NILES, an exceptionally handsome man in his late thirties, rushes in carrying CRAIG, helped by MICKEY.)

BRUCE: (Calling from off.) Where do I go? Where do I go?

EMMA: Quickly—put him on the table. What happened?

BRUCE: He was coming out of the building and he started running to me and then he... then he collapsed to the ground.

EMMA: What is going on inside your bodies!

(CRAIG starts to convulse. BRUCE, MICKEY and NED restrain him.)

Gently.

(She takes a tongue depressor and holds CRAIG's tongue flat; she checks the pulse in his neck; she looks into his eyes for vital signs that he is coming around; CRAIG's convulsions stop.)

You the lover?

BRUCE: Yes.

EMMA: What's your name?

BRUCE: Bruce Niles, ma'am.

EMMA: How's your health?

BRUCE: Fine. Why—is it contagious?

EMMA: I think so.

MICKEY: Then why haven't you come down with it?

EMMA: (Moving toward a telephone.) Because it seems to have a very long incubation period and require close intimacy. Niles? You were Reinhard Holz's lover?

BRUCE: How did you know that? I haven't seen him in a couple of years.

EMMA: (Dialing the hospital emergency number.) He died three weeks ago. Brookner. Emergency. Set up a room immediately.

(She hangs up.)

BRUCE: We were only boyfriends for a couple months.

MICKEY: It's like some sort of plague.

EMMA: There's always a plague. Of one kind or another. Mr. Weeks, I don't think your friend is going to live for very long.

Scene Two

FELIX TURNER'S desk at the New York Times. FELIX is always conservatively dressed, and is outgoing and completely masculine.

NED: (Entering, a bit uncomfortable and nervous.) Mr. Turner?

FELIX: Bad timing. (Looking up.) "Mister"?

NED: My name is Ned Weeks.

FELIX: You caught me at a rough moment. I have a deadline.

NED: I've been told you're gay and might be able to help get vital information in the Times about—

FELIX: You've been told? Who told you?
NED: The grapevine.

FELIX: Here I thought everyone saw me as the Burt Reynolds of West Forty-Third Street. Please don't stop by and say hello to Mr. Sulzberger or Abe Rosenthal. What kind of vital information?

NED: You read the article about this new disease?

FELIX: Yes, I read it. I wondered how long before I'd hear from somebody. Why does everyone gay always think I run the New York Times? I can't help you... with this.

NED: I'm sorry to hear that. What would you suggest I do?

FELIX: Take your pick. I've got twenty-three parties, fourteen gallery openings, thirty-seven new restaurants, twelve new discos, one hundred and five spring collections... Anything sound interesting?

NED: No one here wants to write another article. I've talked to half a dozen reporters and editors and the guy who wrote the first piece.

FELIX: That's true. They won't want to write about it. And I can't. We're very departmentalized. You wouldn't want science to write about sweaters, would you?

NED: It is a very peculiar feeling having to go out and seek support from the straight world for something gay.

FELIX: I wouldn't know about that. I just write about gay designers and gay discos and gay chefs and gay rock stars and gay photographers and gay models and gay celebrities and gay everything. I just don't call them gay. Isn't that enough for doing my bit?

NED: No—I don't think it's going to be.

FELIX: I really do have a deadline and you wouldn't like me to get fired; who would write about us at all?

NED: Guys like you give me a pain in the ass. (He starts out.)

FELIX: You in the phone book?

NED: Yes.

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Scene Three

The law office of Ben Weeks, NED's older brother. Ben always dresses in a suit and tie, which NED never does. The brothers love each other a great deal; Ben's approval is essential to NED. Ben is busy with some papers as NED waits for him.

Ben: Isn't it a bit early to get so worked up?

NED: Don't you be like that, too?

Ben: What have I done now?

NED: My friend Bruce and I went out to Fire Island and over the whole Labor Day weekend we collected the grand sum of $124.

Ben: You can read that as either an indication that it's a beginning and will improve, or as a portent that heads will stay in the sand. My advice is heads are going to stay in the sand.

NED: Because so many gay people are still in the closet?

Ben: Because people don't like to be frightened. When they get scared they don't behave well. It's called denial. (Giving NED some papers to sign.)
NED: *(Signs them automatically.)* What are these for?

BEN: Your account needs some more money. You never seem to do anything twice. One movie, one novel, one play… You know you are now living on your capital. I miss your being in the movie business. I like movies.* *(Unrolls some blueprints.)*

NED: What are those?

BEN: I’ve decided to build a house.

NED: But the one you’re in is terrific.

BEN: I just want to build me a dream house, so now I’m going to.

NED: It looks like a fortress. Does it have a moat? How much is it going to cost?

BEN: I suspect it’ll wind up over a million bucks. But you’re not to tell that to anyone. Not even Sarah. I’ve found some land in Greenwich, by a little river, completely protected by trees. Ned, it’s going to be beautiful.

NED: Doesn’t spending a million dollars on a house frighten you? It would scare the shit out of me. Even if I had it.

BEN: You can have a house anytime you want one. You haven’t done badly.

NED: Do I detect a tinge of approval—from the big brother who always called me lemon?

BEN: Well, you were a lemon.

NED: I don’t want a house.

BEN: Then why have you been searching for one in the country for so many years?

NED: It’s no fun living in one alone.

BEN: There’s certainly no law requiring you to do that. Is this… Bruce someone you’re seeing?

NED: Why thank you for asking. Don’t I wish. I see him. He just doesn’t see me. Everyone’s afraid of me anyway. I frighten them away. It’s called the lemon complex.

BEN: I think you’re the one who’s scared.

NED: You’ve never said that before.

BEN: Yes, I have. You just didn’t hear me. What’s the worst thing that could happen to you.

NED: I’d spend a million bucks on a house. Look, Ben—please! *(He takes the blueprints from him.)* I’ve—we’ve started an organization to raise money and spread information and fight any way we can.

BEN: Fight who and what?

NED: I told you. There’s this strange new disease…

BEN: You’re not going to do that full time?

NED: I just want to help it get started and I’ll worry about how much time later on.

BEN: It sounds to me like another excuse to keep from writing.

NED: I knew you would say that. I was wondering… could your law firm incorporate us and get us tax-exempt status and take us on for free, what’s it called, pro bono?

BEN: Pro bono for what? What are you going to do?
NED: I just told you—raise money and fight.

BEN: You have to be more specific than that. You have to have a plan.

NED: How about if we say we’re going to become a cross between the League of Women Voters and the United States Marines? Is that a good-enough plan?

BEN: Well, we have a committee that decides this sort of thing. I’ll have to put it to the committee.

NED: Why can’t you just say yes?

BEN: Because we have a committee.

NED: But you’re the senior partner and I’m your brother.

BEN: I fail to see what bearing that has on the matter. You’re asking me to ask my partners to give up income that would ordinarily come into their pocket.

NED: I thought every law firm did a certain amount of this sort of thing—charity, worthy causes.

BEN: It’s not up to me, however, to select just what these worthy causes might be.

NED: Well, that’s a pity. What did you start the firm for?

BEN: That’s one of our rules. It’s a democratic firm.

NED: I think I like elitism better. When will you know?

BEN: Know what?

NED: Whether or not your committee wants to help dying faggots?

BEN: I’ll put it to them at the next meeting.

NED: When is that?

BEN: When it is!

NED: When is it? Because if you’re not going to help, I have to find somebody else.

BEN: You’re more than free to do that.

NED: I don’t want to do that! I want my brother’s fancy famous big-deal straight law firm to be the first major New York law firm to do pro bono work for a gay cause. That would give me a great deal of pride. I’m sorry you can’t see that. I’m sorry I’m still putting you in a position where you’re ashamed of me. I thought we’d worked all that out years ago.

BEN: I am not ashamed of you! I told you I’m simply not free to take this on without asking my partners’ approval at the next meeting.

NED: Why don’t I believe that. When is the next meeting?

BEN: Next Monday. Can you wait until next Monday?

NED: Who else is on the committee?

BEN: What difference does that make?

NED: I’ll lobby them. You don’t seem like a very sure vote. Is Nelson on the committee? Norman Ivey? Harvey?

BEN: Norman and Harvey are.

NED: Good.
BEN: Okay? Lemon, where do you want to have lunch today? It's your turn to pay.

NED: It is not. I paid last week.

BEN: That's simply not true.

NED: Last week was . . . French. You’re right. Do you know you’re the only person in the world I can’t get mad at and stay mad at. I think my world would come to an end without you. And then who would Ben talk to? (He embraces BEN.)

BEN: *(Embracing back, a bit.)* That’s true.

NED: You’re getting better at it.

**Scene Four**

NED's apartment. It is stark, modern, all black and white. FELIX comes walking in from another room with a beer, and NED follows, carrying one, too.

FELIX: That’s quite a library in there. You read all those books?

NED: Why does everybody ask that?

FELIX: You have a whole room of 'em, you must want to get asked.

NED: I never thought of it that way. Maybe I do. Thank you. But no, of course I haven’t. They go out of print and then you can’t find them, so I buy them right away.

FELIX: I think you’re going to have to face the fact you won’t be able to read them all before you die.

NED: I think you’re right.

FELIX: You know, I really used to like high-tech, but I’m tired of it now. I think I want chintz back again. Don’t be insulted.

NED: I’m not. I want chintz back again, too.

FELIX: So here we are—two fellows who want chintz back again. Excuse me for saying so, but you are stiff as starch.

NED: It’s been a long time since I’ve had a date. This is a date, isn’t it?

*(FELIX nods.)*

And on the rare occasion, I was usually the asker.

FELIX: That’s what’s thrown you off your style: I called and asked.

NED: Some style. Before any second date I usually receive a phone call that starts with “Now I don’t know what you had in mind, but can’t we just be friends?”

FELIX: No. Are you glad I’m here?

NED: Oh, I’m pleased as punch you’re here. You’re very good-looking. What are you doing here?

FELIX: I’ll let that tiny bit of self-pity pass for the moment.

NED: It’s not self-pity, it’s nervousness.

FELIX: It’s definitely self-pity. Do you think you’re bad-looking?

NED: Where are you from?

FELIX: I’m from Oklahoma. I left home at eighteen and put myself through college. My folks are dead. My dad worked at the refinery in West Tulsa and my mom was a waitress at a luncheonette in Walgreen’s.
NED: Isn't it amazing how a kid can come out of all that and wind up on the Times dictating taste and style and fashion to the entire world?

FELIX: And we were talking so nicely.

NED: Talking is not my problem. Shutting up is my problem. And keeping my hands off you.

FELIX: You don't have to keep your hands off me. You have very nice hands. Do you have any awkward sexual tendencies you want to tell me about, too? That I'm not already familiar with?

NED: What are you familiar with?

FELIX: I have found myself pursuing men who hurt me. Before minor therapy. You're not one of those?

NED: No, I'm the runner. I was the runner. Until major therapy. After people who didn't want me and away from people who do.

FELIX: Isn't it amazing how a kid can come out of all that analyzing everything incessantly down to the most infinitesimal neurosis and still be all alone?

NED: I'm sorry you don't like my Dr. Freud. Another aging Jew who couldn't get laid.

FELIX: Just relax. You'll get laid.

NED: I try being laid-back, assertive, funny, butch... What's the point? I don't think there are many gay relationships that work out anyway.

FELIX: It's difficult to imagine you being laid-back. I know a lot of gay relationships that are working out very well.

NED: I guess I never see them.

FELIX: That's because you're a basket case.

NED: Fuck off.

FELIX: What's the matter? Don't you think you're attractive? Don't you like your body?

NED: I don't think anybody really likes their body. I read that somewhere.

FELIX: You know my fantasy has always been to go away and live by the ocean and write twenty-four novels, living with someone just like you with all these books who of course will be right there beside me writing your own twenty-four novels.

NED: (After a beat.) Me, too.

FELIX: Harold Robbins marries James Michener.

NED: How about Tolstoy and Charles Dickens?

FELIX: As long as Kafka doesn't marry Dostoevsky.

NED: Dostoevsky is my favorite writer.

FELIX: I'll have to try him again.

NED: If you really feel that way, why do you write all that society and party and fancy-ball-gown bullshit?

FELIX: Here we go again. I'll bet you gobble it up every day.

NED: I do. I also know six people who've died. When I came to you a few weeks ago, it was only one.
FELIX: I'm sorry. Is that why you agreed to this date?

NED: Do you know that when Hitler's Final Solution to eliminate the Polish Jews was first mentioned in the Times it was on page twenty-eight. And on page six of the Washington Post. And the Times and the Post were owned by Jews. What causes silence like that? Why didn't the American Jews help the German Jews get out? Their very own people! Scholars are finally writing honestly about this—I've been doing some research—and it's damming to everyone who was here then: Jewish leadership for being totally ineffective; Jewish organizations for constantly fighting among themselves, unable to cooperate even in the face of death: Zionists versus non-Zionists, Rabbi Wise against Rabbi Silver . . .

FELIX: Is this some sort of special way you talk when you don't want to talk? We were doing so nicely.

NED: We were?

FELIX: Wasn't there an awful lot of anti-Semitism in those days? Weren't Jews afraid of rubbing people's noses in too much shit?

NED: Yes, everybody has a million excuses for not getting involved. But aren't there moral obligations, moral commandments to try everything possible? Where were the Christian churches, the Pope, Churchill? And don't get me started on Roosevelt . . . how I was brought up to worship him, all Jews were. A clear statement from him would have put everything on the front pages, would have put Hitler on notice. But his administration did its best to stifle publicity at the same time as they clamped down immigration laws forbidding entry, and this famous haven for the oppressed became as inaccessible as Tibet. The title of Treasury Secretary Morgenthau's report to Roosevelt was Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews, which he wrote in 1944. Dachau was opened in 1933. Where was everybody for eleven years? And then it was too late.

FELIX: This is turning out to be a very romantic evening.

NED: And don't tell me how much you can accomplish working from the inside. Jewish leaders, relying on their contacts with people in high places, were still, quietly, from the inside, attempting to persuade them when the war was over.

FELIX: What do you want me to say? Do you ever take a vacation?

NED: A vacation. I forgot. That's the great goal, isn't it. A constant Fire Island vacation. Party, party; fuck, fuck. Maybe you can give me a few trendy pointers on what to wear.

FELIX: Boy, you really have a bug up your ass. Look, I'm not going to tell them I'm gay and could I write about the few cases of a mysterious disease that seems to be standing in the way of your kissing me even though there must be half a million gay men in this city who are fine and healthy. Let us please acknowledge the law of averages. And this is not World War II. The numbers are nowhere remotely comparable. And all analogies to the Holocaust are tired, overworked, boring, probably insulting, possibly true, and a major turn-off.

NED: Are they?

FELIX: Boy, I think I've found myself a real live weird one. I had no idea. (Pause.) Hey, I just called you weird.
NED: You are not the first.

FELIX: You've never had a lover, have you?

NED: Where did you get that from?

FELIX: Have you? Wow.

NED: I suppose you've had quite a few.

FELIX: I had a very good one for a number of years, thank you. He was older than I was and he found someone younger.

NED: So you like them older. You looking for a father?

FELIX: No, I am not looking for a father! God, you are relentless. And as cheery as Typhoid Mary.

(NEB comes over to FELIX. Then he leans over and kisses him. The kiss becomes quite intense. Then NED breaks away, jumps up, and begins to walk around nervously.)

NED: The American Jews knew exactly what was happening, but everything was downplayed and stilled. Can you imagine how effective it would have been if every Jew in America had marched on Washington? Proudly! Who says I want a lover? Huh!? I mean, why doesn't anybody believe me when I say I do not want a lover?

FELIX: You are fucking crazy. Jews, Dachau, Final Solution—what kind of date is this! I don't believe anyone in the whole wide world doesn't want to be loved. Ned, you don't remember me, do you? We've been in bed together. We made love. We talked. We kissed. We cuddled. We made love again. I keep waiting for you to remember, something, anything. But you don't!

NED: How could I not remember you?

FELIX: I don't know.

NED: Maybe if I saw you naked.

FELIX: It's okay as long as we treat each other like whores. It was at the baths a few years ago. You were busy cruising some blond number and I stood outside your door waiting for you to come back and when you did you gave me such an inspection up and down you would have thought I was applying for the CIA.

NED: And then what?

FELIX: I just told you. We made love twice. I thought it was lovely. You told me your name was Ned, that when you were a child you read a Philip Barry play called Holiday where there was a Ned, and you immediately switched from... Alexander? I teased you for taking such a Wasp, up-in-Connecticut-for-the-weekend name, and I asked what you did, and you answered something like you'd tried a number of things, and I asked you if that had included love, which is when you said you had to get up early in the morning. That's when I left. But I tossed you my favorite go-fuck-yourself when you told me "I really am not in the market for a lover"—men do not just naturally not love—they learn not to. I am not a whore. I just sometimes make mistakes and look for love in the wrong places. And I think you're a bluffer. Your novel was all about a man desperate for love and a relationship, in a world filled with nothing but casual sex.

NED: Do you think we could start over?

FELIX: Maybe.
Scene Five

NED’s apartment. MICKEY, BRUCE AND TOMMY BOATWRIGHT, a Southerner in his late twenties, are stuffing envelopes with various inserts and then packing them into cartons. Beer and pretzels.

MICKEY: (Calling off.) Ned, Gregory says hello and he can’t believe you’ve turned into an activist. He says where were you fifteen years ago when we needed you.

NED: (Coming in with a tray with more beer.) You tell Gregory fifteen years ago no self-respecting faggot would have anything to do with you guys.

TOMMY: I was twelve years old.

BRUCE: We’re not activists.

MICKEY: If you’re not an activist, Bruce, then what are you?

BRUCE: Nothing. I’m only in this until it goes away.

MICKEY: You know, the battle against the police at Stonewall was won by transvestites. We all fought like hell. It’s you Brooks Brothers guys who—

BRUCE: That’s why I wasn’t at Stonewall. I don’t have anything in common with those guys, girls, whatever you call them. Ned, Robert Stokes has it. He called me today.

NED: At Glenn Fitzsimmons’ party the other night, I saw one friend there I knew was sick, I learned about two others, and then walking home I bumped into Richie Faro, who told me he’d just been diagnosed.

MICKEY: Richie Faro?

NED: All this on Sixth Avenue between Nineteenth and Eighth Streets.

MICKEY: Richie Faro—gee, I haven’t seen him since Stonewall. I think we even had a little affairlet.

BRUCE: Are you a transvestite?

MICKEY: No, but I’ll fight for your right to be one.

BRUCE: I don’t want to be one!

MICKEY: I’m worried this organization might only attract white bread and middle class. We need blacks . . .

TOMMY: Right on!

MICKEY: . . . and . . . how do you feel about lesbians?

BRUCE: Not very much. I mean, they’re . . . something else.

MICKEY: I wonder what they’re going to think about all this? If past history is any guide, there’s never been much support by either half of us for the other. Tommy, are you a lesbian?

TOMMY: (As he exits into the kitchen.) I have done and seen everything.

NED: (To Bruce.) How are you doing?

BRUCE: I’m okay now. I forgot to thank you for sending flowers.

NED: That’s okay.

BRUCE: Funny—my mother sent flowers. We’ve never even talked about my being gay. I told her Craig died. I guess she knew.
ned: I think mothers somehow always know. Would you like to have dinner next week, maybe see a movie?

bruce: (Uncomfortable when ned makes advances.) Actually...it's funny...it happened so fast. You know Albert? I've been seeing him.

d incred: That guy in the Calvin Klein ads? Great!

(tommy returns with another carton of envelopes and boxes.)

bruce: I don't think I like to be alone. I've always been with somebody.

mickey: (Looking up from his list-checking.) We have to choose a president tonight, don't forget. I'm not interested. And what about a board of directors?

bruce: (Looking at one of the flyers.) Mickey, how did you finally decide to say it? I didn't even look.

mickey: I just said the best medical knowledge, which admittedly isn't very much, seems to feel that a virus has landed in our community. It could have been any community, but it landed in ours. I guess we just got in the way. Boy, are we going to have paranoia problems.

ned: (Looking at a flyer.) That's all you said?

mickey: See what I mean? No, I also put in the benefit-dance announcement and a coupon for donations.

ned: What about the recommendations?

mickey: I recommend everyone should donate a million dollars. How are we going to make people realize this is not just a gay problem? If it happens to us, it can happen to anybody.

ned: (Who has read the flyer and is angry.) Mickey, I thought we talked this out on the phone. We must tell everybody what Emma wants us to tell them.

mickey: She wants to tell them so badly she won't lend her name as recommending it. (To the others.) This is what Ned wrote for me to send out. "If this doesn't scare the shit out of you, and rouse you to action, gay men may have no future here on earth." Neddie, I think that's a bit much.

bruce: You'll scare everybody to death!

ned: Shake up. What's wrong with that? This isn't something that can be force-fed gently; it won't work. Mickey neglected to read my first sentence.

mickey: "It's difficult to write this without sounding alarmist or scared." Okay, but then listen to this: "I am sick of guys moaning that giving up careless sex until this blows over is worse than death...I am sick of guys who can only think with their cocks...I am sick of closeted gays. It's 1982 now, guys, when are you going to come out? By 1984 you could be dead."

bruce: You're crazy.

ned: Am I? There are almost five hundred cases now. Okay, if we're not sending it out, I'll get the Native to run it.

bruce: But we can't tell people how to live their lives! We can't do that. And besides, the entire gay political platform is fucking. We'd get it from all sides.

ned: You make it sound like that's all that being gay means.

bruce: That's all it does mean!
MICKEY: It's the only thing that makes us different.

NED: I don't want to be considered different.

BRUCE: Neither do I, actually.

MICKEY: Well, I do.

BRUCE: Well, you are!

NED: Why is it we can only talk about our sexuality, and so relentlessly? You know, Mickey, all we've created is generations of guys who can't deal with each other as anything but erections. We can't even get a meeting with the mayor's gay assistant!

TOMMY: I'm very interested in setting up some sort of services for the patients. We've got to start thinking about them.

BRUCE: (Whispering to NED.) Who's he?

TOMMY: He heard about you and he found you and here he is. My name is Tommy Boatwright... (To NED.) Why don't you write that down? Tommy Boatwright. In real life, I'm a hospital administrator. And I'm a Southern bitch.

NED: Welcome to gay politics.

BRUCE: Ned, I won't have anything to do with any organization that tells people how to live their lives.

NED: It's not telling them. It's a recommendation.

MICKEY: With a shotgun to their heads.

BRUCE: It's interfering with their civil rights.

MICKEY: Fucking as a civil right? Don't we just wish.

TOMMY: What if we put it in the form of a recommendation from gay doctors? So that way we're just the conduit.

NED: I can't get any gay doctor to go on record and say publicly what Emma wants.

BRUCE: (Suddenly noticing an envelope.) What the fuck is this?

MICKEY: Unh, oh!

BRUCE: Look at this! Was this your idea?

NED: I'm looking. I'm not seeing. What don't I see?

MICKEY: What we put for our return address.

NED: You mean the word "gay" is on the envelope?

BRUCE: You're damn right. Instead of just the initials. Who did it?

NED: Well, maybe it was Pierre who designed it. Maybe it was a mistake at the printers. But it is the name we chose for this organization...

BRUCE: You chose. I didn't want "gay" in it.

MICKEY: No, we all voted. That was one of those meetings when somebody actually showed up.

BRUCE: We can't send them out.

NED: We have to if we want anybody to come to the dance. They were late from the printers as it is.

BRUCE: We can go through and scratch out the word with a Magic Marker.
NED: Ten thousand times? Look, I feel sympathy for young guys still living at home on Long Island with their parents, but most men getting these... Look at you, in your case what difference does it make? You live alone, you own your own apartment, your mother lives in another state...

BRUCE: What about my mailman?

(MICKEY lets out a little laughing yelp, then clears his throat.)

NED: You don’t expect me to take that seriously?

BRUCE: Yes, I do!

NED: What about your doorman?

BRUCE: What about him?

NED: Why don’t you worry about him? All those cute little Calvin Klein numbers you parade under his nose, he thinks you’re playing poker with the boys?

BRUCE: You don’t have any respect for anyone who doesn’t think like you do, do you?

NED: Bruce, I don’t agree with you about this. I think it’s imperative that we all grow up now and come out of the closet.

MICKEY: Ladies, behave! Ned, you don’t think much of our sexual revolution. You say it all the time.

NED: No, I say I don’t think much of promiscuity. And what’s that got to do with gay envelopes?

MICKEY: But you’ve certainly done your share.

NED: That doesn’t mean I approve of it or like myself for doing it.

MICKEY: But not all of us feel that way. And we don’t like to hear the word "promiscuous" used pejoratively.

BRUCE: Or so publicly.

NED: Where the world can hear it, Bruce?

MICKEY: Sex is liberating. It’s always guys like you who’ve never had one who are always screaming about relationships, and monogamy and fidelity and holy matrimony. What are you, a closet straight?

NED: Mickey, more sex isn’t more liberating. And having so much sex makes finding love impossible.

MICKEY: Neddie, dahling, do not put your failure to find somebody on the morality of all the rest of us.

NED: Mickey, dahling, I’m just saying what I think! It’s taken me twenty years of assorted forms of therapy in various major world capitals to be able to do so without guilt, fear, or giving a fuck if anybody likes it or not.

TOMMY: I’ll buy that!

NED: Thank you.

BRUCE: But not everyone’s so free to say what they think!

MICKEY: Or able to afford so much therapy. Although God knows I need it. (Looking at his watch.) Look, it’s late, and we haven’t elected our president. Ned, I think it should be... Bruce. Everybody knows him and likes him and... I mean, everybody expects you to—

NED: You mean he’s popular and everybody’s afraid of me.
MICKEY: Yes.

TOMMY: No.

MICKEY: No.

TOMMY: No, what it means is that you have a certain kind of energy that's definitely needed, but Bruce has a... presence that might bring people together in a way you can't.

NED: What's that mean?

TOMMY: It means he's gorgeous—and all the kids on Christopher Street and Fire Island will feel a bit more comfortable following him.

NED: Just like high school.

TOMMY AND MICKEY: Yes!

NED: Follow him where?

TOMMY: (Putting his arm around him.) Well, honey, why don't we have a little dinner and I'll tell you all about it—and more.

NED: Unh, thanks, I'm busy.

TOMMY: Forever? Well, that's too bad. I wanted to try my hand at smoothing out your rough edges.

MICKEY: Good luck.

NED: (To BRUCE.) Well, it looks like you're the president.

BRUCE: I don't think I want this.

NED: Oh, come on, you're gorgeous—and we're all going to follow you.

BRUCE: Fuck you. I accept.

NED: Well, fuck you, congratulations.

TOMMY: There are going to be a lot of scared people out there needing someplace to call for information. I'd be interested in starting some sort of telephone hotline.

BRUCE: (His first decision in office.) Unh... sure. Just prepare a detailed budget and let me see it before you make any commitments.

MICKEY: (To NED.) Don't you feel in safe hands already?

TOMMY: (To BRUCE.) What is it you do for a living, if I may ask?

BRUCE: I'm a vice-president of Citibank.

TOMMY: That's nothing to be shy about, sugar. You invented the cash machine. (Picking up an envelope.) So, are we mailing these out or what?

BRUCE: What do you think?

TOMMY: I'll bet nobody even notices.

BRUCE: Oh, there will be some who notice. Okay.

TOMMY: Okay? Okay! Our first adult compromise. Thank y'all for your cooperation.

(FELIX, carrying a shopping bag, lets himself in with his own key. NED GOES TO GREET HIM.)

NED: Everybody, this is Felix. Bruce, Tommy, Mickey. Bruce just got elected president.

FELIX: My condolences. Don't let me interrupt. Anybody want any Balducci gourmet ice cream—it's eighteen bucks a pint?
(NED proudly escorts FELIX into the kitchen.)

MICKEY: It looks like Neddie’s found a boyfriend.

BRUCE: Thank God, now maybe he’ll leave me alone.

TOMMY: Shit, he’s got his own key. It looks like I signed on too late.

BRUCE: I worry about Ned. I mean, I like him a lot, but his style is so . . . confrontational. We could get into a lot of trouble with him.

TOMMY: Honey, he looks like a pretty good catch to me. We could get into a lot of trouble without him.

(NED comes back and starts clearing up.)

MICKEY: I’m going home. My Gregory, he burns dinner every night, and when I’m late, he blames me.

BRUCE: (To NED.) My boss doesn’t know and he hates gays. He keeps telling me fag jokes and I keep laughing at them.

NED: Citibank won’t fire you for being gay. And if they did we could make such a stink that every gay customer in New York would leave them. Come on, Bruce—you used to be a fucking Green Beret!

TOMMY: Goodness!

BRUCE: But I love my job. I supervise a couple thousand people all over the country and my investments are up to twenty million now.

MICKEY: I’m leaving. (He befts a carton and starts out.)

BRUCE: Wait, I’m coming. (To NED.) I just think we have to stay out of anything political.

NED: And I think it’s going to be impossible to pass along any information or recommendation that isn’t going to be considered political by somebody.

TOMMY: And I think this is not an argument you two boys are going to settle tonight.

(BRUCE picks up a big carton and heads out.)

(He has waited impatiently for BRUCE to leave so he can be alone with NED.) I just wanted to tell you I really admire your writing . . . and your passion . . . (As FELIX reenters from the kitchen, TOMMY drops his flirtatious tone.) . . . and what you’ve been saying and doing, and it’s because of you I’m here. (To FELIX.) Take care this good man doesn’t burn out. Good night. (He leaves.)

NED: We just elected a president who’s in the closet. I lost every argument. And I’m the only screamer among them. Oh, I forgot to tell them—I’m getting us something on the local news.

FELIX: Which channel?

NED: It’s not TV, it’s radio . . . It’s a start.

FELIX: Ned, I think you should have been president.

NED: I didn’t really want it. I’ve never been any good playing on a team. I like stirring things up on my own. Bruce will be a good president. I’ll shape him up. Where’s the ice cream? Do you think I’m crazy?

FELIX: I certainly do. That’s why I’m here.

NED: I’m so glad.
FELIX: That I'm here?

NED: That you think I'm crazy.

(They kiss.)

Scene Six

Ben's office. In a corner is a large model of the new house under a cloth cover.

BEN: You got your free legal work from my firm; now I'm not going to be on your board of directors, too.

NED: I got our free legal work from your firm by going to Norman and he said, "Of course, no problem." I asked him, "Don't you have to put it before your committee?" And he said, "Nah, I'll just tell them we're going to do it."

BEN: Well... you got it.

NED: All I'm asking for is the use of your name. You don't have to do a thing. This is an honorary board. For the stationery.

BEN: Ned, come on—it's your cause, not mine.

NED: That is just an evasion!

BEN: It is not. I don't ask you to help me with the Larchmont School board, do I?

NED: But I would if you asked me.

BEN: But I don't.

NED: Would you be more interested if you thought this was a straight disease?

BEN: It has nothing to do with your being gay.

NED: Of course it has. What else has it got to do with?

BEN: I've got other things to do.

NED: But I'm telling you you don't have to do a thing!

BEN: The answer is no.

NED: It's impossible to get this epidemic taken seriously. I wrote a letter to the gay newspaper and some guy wrote in, "Oh there goes Ned Weeks again; he wants us all to die so he can say 'I told you so.'"

BEN: He sounds like a crazy.

NED: It kept me up all night.

BEN: Then you're crazy, too.

NED: I ran into an old friend I hadn't seen in years in the subway, and I said, "Hello, how are you?" He started screaming, "You're giving away all our secrets, you're painting us as sick, you're destroying homosexuality" and then he tried to slug me. Right there in the subway. Under Bloomingdale's.

BEN: Another crazy.

NED: We did raise $50,000 at our dance last week. That's more money than any gay organization has ever raised at one time in this city before.

BEN: That's wonderful, Ned. So you must be beginning to do something right.

NED: And I made a speech appealing for volunteers and we got over a hundred people to sign up, including a few women.
And I've got us on Donahue. I'm going to be on Donahue with a doctor and a patient.

BEN: Don't tell your mother.

NED: Why not?

BEN: She's afraid someone is going to shoot you.

(BEN rolls the model house stage center and pulls off the cover.)

NED: What about you? Aren't you afraid your corporate clients will say, "Was that your faggot brother I saw on TV?" Excuse me—is this a bad time? You seem preoccupied.

BEN: Do I? I'm sorry. A morning with the architect is enough to shake me up a little bit. It's going to cost more than I thought.

NED: More?

BEN: Twice as much.

NED: Two million?

BEN: I can handle it.

NED: You can? That's very nice. You know, Ben, one of these days I'll make you agree that over twenty million men and women are not all here on this earth because of something requiring the services of a psychiatrist.

BEN: Oh, it's up to twenty million now, is it? Every time we have this discussion, you up the ante.

NED: We haven't had this discussion in years, Ben. And we grow, just like everybody else.

BEN: Look, I try to understand. I read stuff. (Picking up a copy of Newsweek, with "Gay America" on the cover.) I open magazines and I see pictures of you guys in leather and chains and whips and black masks, with captions saying this is a social worker, this is a computer analyst, this is a schoolteacher—and I say to myself, "This isn't Ned."

NED: No, it isn't. It isn't most of us. You know the media always dramatizes the most extreme. Do you think we all wear dresses, too?

BEN: Don't you?

NED: Me, personally? No, I do not.

BEN: But then you tell me how you go to the bathhouses and fuck blindly, and to me that's not so different from this. You guys don't seem to understand why there are rules, and regulations, guidelines, responsibilities. You guys have a dreadful image problem.

NED: I know that! That's what has to be changed. That's why it's so important to have people like you supporting us. You're a respected person. You already have your dignity.

BEN: We better decide where we're going to eat lunch and get out of here. I have an important meeting.

NED: Do you? How important? I've asked for your support.

BEN: In every area I consider important you have my support.

NED: In some place deep inside of you you still think I'm sick. Isn't that right? Okay. Define it for me. What do you mean by "sick"? Sick unhealthy? Sick perverted? Sick I'll get over it? Sick to be locked up?

BEN: I think you've adjusted to life quite well.
NED: All things considered?

(BEN nods.)

In the only area I consider important I don't have your support at all. The single-minded determination of all you people to forever see us as sick helps keep us sick.

BEN: I saw how unhappy you were!

NED: So were you! You wound up going to shrinks, too. We grew up side by side. We both felt pretty much the same about Mom and Pop. I refuse to accept for one more second that I was damaged by our childhood while you were not.

BEN: But we all don’t react the same way to the same thing.

NED: That’s right. So I became a writer and you became a lawyer I’ll agree to the fact that I have any number of awful character traits. But not to the fact that whatever they did to us as kids automatically made me sick and gay while you stayed straight and healthy.

BEN: Well, that's the difference of opinion we have over theory.

NED: But your theory turns me into a man from Mars. My theory doesn’t do that to you.

BEN: Are you suggesting it was wrong of me to send you into therapy so young? I didn’t think you’d stay in it forever.

NED: I didn’t think I'd done anything wrong until you sent me into it. Ben, you know you mean more to me than anyone else in the world; you always have. Although I think I’ve finally found someone I like . . . Don’t you understand?

BEN: No, I don’t understand.

NED: You’ve got to say it. I'm the same as you. Just say it. Say it!

BEN: No, you’re not. I can’t say it.

NED: (He is heartbroken.) Every time I lose this fight it hurts more. I don’t want to have lunch. I’ll see you. (He starts out.)


NED: You think this is a joke!

BEN: (Angry.) You have my love and you have my legal advice and my financial supervision. I can’t give you the courage to stand up and say to me that you don’t give a good healthy fuck what I think. Please stop trying to wring some admission of guilt out of me. I am truly happy that you’ve met someone. It’s about time. And I’m sorry your friends are dying . . .

NED: If you're so sorry, join our honorary board and say you’re sorry out loud!

BEN: My agreeing you were born just like I was born is not going to help save your dying friends.

NED: Funny—that's exactly what I think will help save my dying friends.

BEN: Ned—you can be gay and you can be proud no matter what I think. Everybody is oppressed by somebody else in some form or another. Some of us learn how to fight back, with or without the help of others, despite their opinions, even those closest to us. And judging from this mess your friends are in, it's imperative that you stand up and fight to be prouder than ever.
NED: Can't you see that I'm trying to do that? Can't your perverse ego proclaiming its superiority see that I'm trying to be proud? You can only find room to call yourself normal.

BEN: You make me sound like I'm the enemy.

NED: I'm beginning to think that you and your straight world are our enemy. I am furious with you, and with myself and with every goddamned doctor who ever told me I'm sick and interfered with my loving a man. I'm trying to understand why nobody wants to hear we're dying, why nobody wants to help, why my own brother doesn't want to help. Two million dollars—for a house! We can't even get twenty-nine cents from the city. You still think I'm sick, and I simply cannot allow that any longer. I will not speak to you again until you accept me as your equal. Your healthy equal. Your brother! (He runs out.)

Scene Seven

NED's apartment. Felix, working on an article, is spread out on the floor with books, notepad, comforter, and pillows. Ned enters, eating from a pint of ice cream.

NED: At the rate I'm going, no one in this city will be talking to me in about three more weeks. I had another fight with Bruce today. I slammed the phone down on him. I don't know why I do that—I'm never finished saying what I want to, so I just have to call him back, during which I inevitably work myself up into another frenzy and hang up on him again. That poor man doesn't know what to do with me. I don't think people like me work at Citibank.

FELIX: Why can't you see what an ordinary guy Bruce is? I know you think he has hidden qualities, if you just give him plant food he'll grow into the fighter you are. He can't. All he's got is a lot of good-looking Pendleton shirts.

NED: I know there are better ways to handle him. I just can't seem to. This epidemic is killing friendships, too. I can't even talk to my own brother. Why doesn't he call me?

FELIX: There's the phone.

NED: Why do I always have to do the running back?

FELIX: All you ever eat is desserts.

NED: Sugar is the most important thing in my life. All the rest is just to stay alive.

FELIX: What was the fight about?

NED: Which fight?

FELIX: Bruce.

NED: Pick a subject.

FELIX: How many do you know now?

NED: Forty... dead. That's too many for one person to know. Curt Morgan, this guy I went to Yale with, just died.

FELIX: Emerick Nolan—he gave me my first job on the Washington Post.

NED: Bruce is getting paranoid: now his lover, Albert, isn't feeling well. Bruce is afraid he's giving it to everyone.

FELIX: Maybe it isn't paranoia. Maybe what we do with our lovers is what we should be thinking about most of all.
(The phone rings. Ned answers it.)

NED: Hello. Hold on. (Locating some pages and reading from them into the phone.) "It is no secret that I consider the mayor to be, along with the Times, the biggest enemy gay men and women must contend with in New York. Until the day I die I will never forgive this newspaper and this mayor for ignoring this epidemic that is killing so many of my friends. If..."
All right, here's the end. "And every gay man who refuses to come forward now and fight to save his own life is truly helping to kill the rest of us. How many of us have to die before you get scared off your ass and into action?"... Thank you.
(He hangs up.) I hear it's becoming known as the Ned Weeks School of Outrage.

FELIX: Who was that?

NED: Felix, I'm orchestrating this really well. I know I am. We have over six hundred volunteers now. I've got us mentioned in Time, Newsweek, the evening news on all three networks, both local and national, English and French and Canadian and Australian TV, all the New York area papers except the Times and the Voice...

FELIX: You're doing great.

NED: But they don't support me! Bruce... this fucking board of directors we put together, all friends of mine—every single one of them yelled at me for two solid hours last night. They think I'm creating a panic, I'm using it to make myself into a celebrity—not one of them will appear on TV or be interviewed, so I do it all by default; so now I'm accused of being self-serving, as if it's fun getting slugged on the subway.

FELIX: They're beginning to get really frightened. You are becoming a leader. And you love to fight.

NED: What? I love it?

FELIX: Yes!

NED: I love to fight? Moi?

FELIX: Yes, you do, and you're having a wonderful time.

NED: Yes, I am. (Meaning Felix.)

FELIX: I did speak to one of our science reporters today.

NED: (Delighted.) Felix! What did he say?

FELIX: He's gay, too, and afraid they'll find out. Don't yell at me! Ned, I tried. All those shrinks, they must have done something right to you.

NED: (Giving Felix a kiss with each name.) Dr. Maley, Dr. Ritvo, Dr. Gillespie, Dr. Greenacre, Dr. Klagsbrun, Dr. Donadello, Dr. Levy... I have only one question now: Why did it have to take so long?

FELIX: You think it's them, do you?

NED: Dr.—I can't remember which one—said it would finally happen. Someone I couldn't scare away would finally show up.

FELIX: At the baths, why didn't you tell me you were a writer?

NED: Why didn't you tell me you worked for the Times? That I would have remembered.

FELIX: If I had told you what I did, would you have seen me again?

NED: Absolutely.
FELIX: You slut!

NED: Felix, we weren't ready then. If I had it, would you leave me?

FELIX: I don't know. Would you, if I did?

NED: No.

FELIX: How do you know?

NED: I just know. You had to have had my mother. She was a dedicated full-time social worker for the Red Cross—she put me to work on the bloodmobile when I was eight. She was always getting an award for being best bloodcacher or something. She's eighty now—touring China. I don't think I'm programmed any other way.

FELIX: I have something to tell you.

NED: You're pregnant.

FELIX: I was married once.

NED: Does that make me the other woman?

FELIX: I thought I was supposed to be straight. She said I had been unfair to her, which I had been. I have a son.

NED: You have a son?

FELIX: She won't let me see him.

NED: You can't see your own son? But didn't you fight? That means you're ashamed. So he will be, too.

FELIX: That's why I didn't tell you before. And who says I didn't fight! What happens to someone who cannot be as strong as you want them to be?

NED: Felix, weakness terrifies me. It scares the shit out of me. My father was weak and I'm afraid I'll be like him. His life didn't stand for anything, and then it was over. So I fight. Constantly. And if I can do it, I can't understand why everybody else can't do it, too. Okay?

FELIX: Okay.

(He pulls off one of his socks and shows NED a purple spot on his foot.)

It keeps getting bigger and bigger, Neddie, and it doesn't go away.

End of Act One.